

562 There is, on the whole, a stirring, Wild West attractiveness about her
177 appearance, this Kalmuck Mongol, even as she goes about the tasks of preparing cheese, chopping wood, or milking.

Nor is she necessarily an ignorant woman. A Mongol princess of Tihwa, for example, has studied English in Pei-p'ing, French and medicine at Brussels, and in addition speaks Russian as well as her native tongue. The problem of so-called Oriental conservatism, according to this woman's views, may have originated in a desire to be undisturbed. But she, and other Mongol intelligentsia, are alert and modest enough to admit that out of the creativeness of the Occident new light is being shed on how man might best live; from the history of such as she and her ancestors, the Occident has in its turn much to learn.

The Kirgiz

563 Another of the fascinating ethnic groups that roam the Sinkiang
773 mountains and steppes are the Kirgiz. They are the people whom a legendary white Prester John is said to have ruled in the Middle Ages, and they are supposed to have introduced the Christianity of Nestorius to Asia. The Kirgiz are related to the old Uighurs also, it seems, and were powerful in the Altai region in the centuries just preceding the Mongol invasion. They, like the Mongols, are horsemen; but their homeland is in the steep crags, the narrow mountain trails and not so much in the steppes. Those who now live in the Pamirs fringing Southwest Sinkiang have their own legends of origin. It seems that there were once *kirk kiz*, "forty maidens," who became pregnant and so gave birth to the Kirgiz people. One version of the story is that they had intercourse with a red dog; another, that they dipped their fingers in a magic stream; a third, that the foam of Lake Issyk Kul served as the needed sperm.

795 Moslems of the Sunni order, the Kirgiz vest their tribal government
622 in the hands of elders whose dicta are strictly respected. These elders adjudicate a multitude of questions such as those of petty thievery, pastoral boundaries, and property settlements. No foreigner is supposed to witness a Kirgiz court, which often meets in an ante-room of an *ak-ui* or *kirga*—the native tent dwelling. Adjournment of the court is sig-

nalized with a loud sounding of the table and a solemnly sworn oath. 695
The vow resounds fiercely through the *ak-ui*, and then justice has been done.

Kirgiz scoff at the thought of grubbing at the soil, but they are 151
hardy, courageous men who mount patrol on the lofty Pamirs. They 223
have a keen sense of sight and can spot small objects from miles away. 224
Falconry is the great sport for those who are the wealthiest, and the 526
usual quarry is a type of hill partridge, the *chikor*. Sometimes the young
women as well as the men become adept at this. Big game is limited,
but at times the Kirgiz do hunt the now rapidly vanishing *ovis poli*,
or long-horned mountain sheep, when it can be found. A sport they
especially like is *baiga*, a contest like the *ulagh* of the Wei-wu-erh. In
baiga some forty or fifty mounted sportsmen strive with each other to
retrieve a dead carcass of a sheep or goat. One of the contestants dashes
forward and hurls the carcass to the ground while the others wait. Then,
in a thundering onrush of dust and shouts, the remainder of the players
lunge toward the game. They resort to all manner of tactics to get to
the recumbent prize—they beat an opponent's mount if it is in the
way, they unhorse each other, and they ride their steeds like cham-
pions. Such confusion and bedlam; but it is rare, beautiful excitement.

A long coat stuffed with wool and cotton is worn by the Kirgiz over 291
trousers tucked into high boots, while a fur piece with ear coverings 581
(or an embroidered round cap) keeps his head warm. His woman is
attired alike, but she wears a turban precariously high on her head. The
gala Kirgiz occasion is a wedding, and divorce is not common. Accord-
ing to his religion a Moslem is permitted four wives, but a Kirgiz is
usually not rich enough to afford more than one. Hilarity and celebra- 764
tion, not sadness, characterize the funeral ceremony of the Kirgiz. The
basis for this, they point out, is that the dead are giving away to their
heirs the wealth that has been amassed during a lifetime of labor;
festivity, consequently, is in order. At the funeral the dead person is
placed on a hill-top, interred with food, clothing, and a certain amount
of money in a high, walled tomb. The sustenance is supposed to feed
him on the way to the hereafter. This, like certain other rites of the